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DE RUEHMR #0155 1481435
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 271435Z MAY 08
FM AMEMBASSY MASERU
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3700
INFO RUCNSAD/SADC COLLECTIVE
RUEHMR/AMEMBASSY MASERU 4119

UNCLAS MASERU 000155

SIPDIS

DEPT ALSO FOR AF/S, DS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [LT](#)

SUBJECT: LESOTHO: TAXI PROTESTERS GIVE GOL ULTIMATUM

REF: MASERU 151

¶1. On the morning of May 26, the Maseru Taxi Association's Regional Committee led a group of several thousand members and supporters to protest their dissatisfaction with the recent introduction of Government of Lesotho bus services (reftel), disrupting public transportation for about three hours. About 1,000 taxi owners and operators parked their vehicles near Maseru's Convention Center and marched into central business and government districts, where their numbers grew to approximately 3,000 participants. A small delegation of association representatives delivered a petition letter to Maseru's acting traffic commissioner before proceeding to the Ministry of Transportation, delivering a similar letter to Deputy Principal Secretary Mokete. According to local observers, several marchers vandalized cars on their return route, although the event was generally peaceful. Normal taxi services resumed at approximately 1:30 p.m.

¶2. According to local sources, the taxi petition included three demands: 1) the resignation of Minister of Public Works and Transport Tsele Chakela; 2) consultations with taxi operators on the routes and operations of GOL buses; and 3) lowering of recently raised taxi registration fees. The petition demanded that the Government respond to the petition letter by June 2; absent a satisfactory response the Taxi Association signaled its intent to take further action, including a general strike. Several political opposition strikes ("stay-aways") in 2007, which the Taxi Association actively supported, essentially shut down much of the Maseru economy and also disrupted intercity transportation. The 2007 strikes, accompanied by intimidation and isolated violence, motivated the GOL to purchase its own buses earlier this year in order to transport civil servants and other workers (reftel).

MURPHY